



STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY,
TRADE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

128 - 10th Ave SW • PO Box 42525 • Olympia, Washington 98504-2525 • (360) 725-4000 • Fax (360) 586-8440

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Contact: Kate Engle Rothschild, CERB Program Manager, 360.725.4058
Michelle Zahrlly, CTED Communications Director, 360.480.8727
Scott Keller, Executive Director, Port of Benton, 509.375.3060
Pat Haley, Director, Port of Douglas County, 509.884.4700

State Investment Aids Future Economic Growth in the Tri-Cities
and Central Washington

OLYMPIA—State investments in Benton and Douglas counties will evaluate future business growth through economic feasibility plans, as a result of actions taken at the March 17, 2005 meeting of the Washington State Community Economic Revitalization Board (CERB).

In Benton County, CERB conditionally approved a \$20,000 grant for the Port of Benton to conduct a feasibility study for the proposed construction of a transload facility somewhere in Benton County on port-owned property. This study is needed to determine the economic benefits if such a facility were constructed, and future expansion of the Port's facilities. The study will evaluate ways to make the agriculture-based economy more profitable and diversify the local economy from its current dependence on government contracts. The proposed transload facility would allow small or less efficiently packed truck hauls to be delivered to a centrally located refrigerated facility, then re-packaged for distribution outside the area using the Tri-City and Olympia Railroad Company with connections to the Burlington Northern Santa Fe and Union Pacific Railroads. This facility would be used to ship and receive produce and related goods in and out of the area, provide cost efficiencies, and reduce the normal wear and tear on State highway systems, as well.

The transloading of produce is currently occurring in limited quantities via the Tri-Cities and Olympia Railroad Company through a lease of existing Port of Benton facilities and the Port of Benton railroad system. "This small business version, developed by the Tri-City and Olympia Railroad in a refurbished Port building is what has inspired the Port of Benton to explore the possibilities of a well designed, location appropriate, optimum operating transload facility," said Scott Keller, Executive Director of the Port of Benton. "The development of the Port of Benton's Manufacturing Mall, a probable location for the project, is considered critical to the City of Richland and the Tri-Cities area," continued Keller. "Further development of the rail system and facilities supporting the agricultural industry will increase the

growth of agricultural businesses in the region, which is a specific goal of the economic development strategy of the community,” concluded Keller.

CERB funds are matched with \$20,000 in Port funds.

In Douglas County, CERB conditionally approved a \$30,000 grant for the Port of Douglas County to conduct a feasibility study to evaluate the market potential for exporting premium grade chilled pork (refrigerated) value-added products to Japan and other Pacific Rim countries. The study will also create a business plan for Washington farmers to get involved in hog farming. With other public funds, the Port study will also provide the needed information to recruit a prospective processing plant to locate in the state distribution and export of a premium grade pork product.

“This project has the potential of affecting all of Eastern Washington,” said Pat Haley, Director, Port of Douglas County. “The number of hog farms necessary for Japanese demand will be spread throughout several Central Washington counties, such as Douglas, Adams, Grant, Lincoln, Whitman, Walla Walla, Benton, Garfield, Asotin and Columbia. Farmers will have the opportunity to both raise barley grain needed for the hog feed and raise the animals used in production,” concluded Haley.

The Port of Douglas County has partnered with Terry Brewer, Director of the Grant County Economic Development Council over the past three years in developing the planning funding to evaluate the potential of this industry in Washington State.

CERB funds are matched with \$115,000 in other federal and local funds.

“Planning and evaluating for future economic development is a critical tool the CERB Program offers in rural counties,” said Judith Boekholder, CERB Chair. “The investment of CERB funds in feasibility and planning helps rural communities bridge the gap that can lead to the implementation of priority economic development projects supporting business development and job creation,” concluded Boekholder.

“Collaboration between Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development’s Economic Development Division staff and local project sponsors helps strengthen and guide projects to state financing opportunities, such as CERB,” said Juli Wilkerson, Director of CTED. “These two planning projects affecting the Tri-Cities and greater Central Washington are examples of the depth and breadth of community and CTED staff work that’s required to prepare attractive sites for future business development and new job creation. CTED is pleased to work with CERB in support of Washington’s industrial business climate,” concluded Wilkerson.

CERB is the state’s economic development resource strategically focused to help business and industry create and retain jobs in partnership with local government. CERB finances publicly owned economic development infrastructure to encourage new development and expansion in areas where growth is desired. These improvements include industrial water and sewer, industrial wastewater treatment facilities, telecommunications, electricity, natural gas, roads, bridges, general-purpose industrial buildings and port facilities. Management support is provided by the Washington State Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development. More information is available at www.cted.wa.gov.

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